

Minneapolis Veterans Hospital Medical Foster Home Program: Where Hero's meet Angels

The US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has a national sense of duty to help Veterans age in place. In response to the growing number of aging Veterans and those with disabilities, the Veterans Medical Foster Home Program (MFH) was developed as a pilot project in 2004. Since this time the Veterans Medical Foster Home has grown to be a leading example of how a family home environment can provide individualized, high quality, comprehensive care to our Veterans.

Here in Minneapolis, our Medical Foster Care program partners with licensed family homes in the Twin Cities area. The homes currently partnering with the VA can provide care for Veterans with complex medical and psychosocial needs, even through the end of life. MFH provide support with daily cares, medications, nutrition, supervision, recreation, emotional support and so much more. To afford the MFH's Veterans may pay privately or have a state Medical Assistance waiver.

The care setting is highly individualized, with a maximum of 3 residents in a home. Veterans enjoy their private rooms, home cooked meals, daily care support and favorite leisure time activities. A key component to the Medical Foster Home program is the additional support of our VA Home Based Primary Care (HBPC) team. This is a comprehensive team that visits the Veteran and the caregiver regularly. HBPC is an interdisciplinary team that includes: Primary Care provider, RN/LPN, Social Worker, Psychology, Dietitian, and an Occupational therapist. In addition to the support from HBPC, there are Recreation Therapy visits and the Medical Foster Home Coordinator makes unannounced monthly visits.

All the Medical Foster Homes are provided with additional support and education during the mandatory bi-annual trainings. These MN State licensed homes are inspected initially and annually by the Medical Foster Home coordinator and inspection team.

We are currently looking for experienced caregivers to help give back to Veteran's by providing a safe loving home to support as they age in place.

For more information call 612-467-2619

https://www.minneapolis.va.gov/services/medical_foster_home.asp

To further share how MFH empowers Veterans to live their fullest life Miguel (Veteran) and Amro (MFH Caregiver) wanted to share their journey of "caring".

Miguel enlisted in the United States Navy in 1973, reporting to Great Lakes, Illinois for basic training. Through the Navy Miguel had the opportunity to see many diverse places. He was stationed in different counties across the world during his time in service that he would not have been able to see, had he not enlisted.

After discharging from the military Miguel took to the kitchen. He managed at a successful restaurant here in the Twin Cities. He started at the ground level; as a dishwasher working hard

to become the kitchen manager. As a kitchen manager he had a highly responsible and stressful position. During this time, he was also receiving health care through the Minneapolis VA Healthcare system and was diagnosed with diabetes mellitus at the age of thirty-five. Miguel endures living with several health complications and was no longer able to work. His doctor offered VA HBPC to provide support through an interdisciplinary team. After some time of trying to manage on his own, the HBPC nurse encouraged him to look at the Medical Foster Home Program. "I was leery at first," Miguel said, "I didn't want to give up my independence, I had my own place in St. Paul. But I wasn't independent anymore. I couldn't take care of myself the way I wanted too. I couldn't manage day to day life, I just couldn't do it. I could barely walk. So, I decided to look at what this program was all about."



The MFH Coordinator met with Miguel to provide education on the program and how MFH could support him. Miguel decided to tour a home and meet a caregiver that was appropriate to meet his needs. He decided to move in and give it a try as everyone felt it was a "good match". He moved in and the HBPC team continued to follow him and the MFH Coord began to visit also. Miguel noted, after adjusting a month, "everything was safer, I felt safer than I would if I were on my own."

Fast forward five years and Miguel remains in the MFH and is flourishing.

Miguel is doing so well, that with support, every couple of years Miguel even travels to see his family. In addition to his daily care (Dressing, bathing, nutrition, medications) he has a personalized private room and feels part of a loving family home. He enjoys the camaraderie of the family and two other residents. Some of their favorite pastimes are playing dominos, going out to eat, watching movies, gardening and shopping.

So, why do caregivers open their family homes to provide 24/7 care? Amro is an experienced caregiver that worked in a bank for numerous years. He felt that he wanted to make a difference for others and left that industry to become a caregiver. He worked in group homes and gained valuable skills to provide care. After this he opened his family home and became licensed to provide care. Amro has been a caregiver with the VA MFH program for seven years. "I like to see the improvement that happens, in the first six months, you can see big improvements," Amro said when asked what he likes about being a caregiver.

Amro says. "Being a Caregiver is a big commitment. Once Veteran moves in they become part of your family."

It's important to Amro to see his residents to live as independently as possible. Amro shared that "I encourage them, and educate them on the best choices. I respect that the choices they make are ultimately there's. With Miguel one goal is monitoring his sugars. I try and let him know how what he eats will affect him." Based on the Veterans interests and needs goal setting is important to Veterans reaching their highest potential. The team works with the Veteran & caregiver to set goals of care.

Amro enjoys working with the VA MFH / HBPC team. "They are dedicated to ensuring that Veterans can live to their best potential and supporting the caregiver along that process."

When Miguel was asked about the support he receives via the VA MFH / HBPC team he said, "Amro and the VA are a tremendous help, without them I don't think I'd be doing this great." The VA team makes sure that caregivers are well supported with their relief workers and respite time.

If the VA MFH / HBPC program could be summed up in a few words it might be love, family and caring. It's a home away from home, its where heroes meet angels.

Written by Minneapolis MFH Staff: Kathryn Schaefer West LICSW & Blaine Seibel Program Support.